

Commencement Speech  
Autumn Quarter  
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by  
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SOMETHING GOOD

From the well-known and beloved motion picture comes a tender moment when Maria and the Captain sing these words...

Perhaps I had a wicked childhood  
Perhaps I had a miserable youth  
But somewhere in my wicked, miserable past  
There must have been a moment of truth.  
For here you are standing there loving me whether or not  
You should  
So somewhere in my youth or childhood  
I must have done something good.  
Nothing comes from nothing, nothing ever could  
So somewhere in my youth or childhood,  
I must have done something good.

So, today here you are sitting there in front of me---you must have done something good. For one thing, you have met all the requirements for the degree which you will receive today. Other good things which you have done include...

Making passing grades  
Went to class; perhaps slept through a few  
Listened to lectures both good and boring  
Worked in the laboratory  
Read good books  
Solved problems; made decisions  
Wrestled with new concepts  
Examined varying philosophies and points of view  
Learned something about a culture different from yours  
Learned more about yourself and...  
Developed skills that will last a lifetime

Yes, you must have done something good. From this day forward there will be many opportunities to continue to do something good. But, for most of you, the arenas will change. Most likely the arenas will be (1) work, (2) community and (3) family. I will discuss briefly each of these arenas and possibilities for doing something good in each.

Work

I imagine that most individuals in this graduating class either are looking for a job or have found one. Some of you will go to graduate school while others will go to a professional

school--law or perhaps medicine. At any rate the scope of work that will likely be done by this class is tremendous. In this graduating class there may be a playwright, poet, physician, dentist, teacher, social worker, nurse, dietitian, engineer, veterinarian, and agronomist, an entomologist, a family therapist, chemist, optometrist, pharmacist, restaurant owner, a governor or the first woman president of the United States.

Through these and many other positions great accomplishments could be made...someone in this graduating class may

- Discover a way to mend the spinal cord
- A scientist may find a cure for cancer or aids
- A teacher may determine alternative and successful ways for better learning
- A horticulturalist may help us to keep our lawns green even in drought
- Someone may solve the political nightmare of how to get food to the world's hungry
- Engineers and physicians working together may create better artificial human parts
- Someone in this audience will devise even better uses of the computer
- And, someone in this audience may devise a better system for tracking the economic status of our society.

These are only a few of the good things this class could do.

How you work is as important that you work. There is no grand plan that will ensure success in work but according to a management newsletter (Administrator, December 12, 1988, volume 7, number 23, p. 22) There are 4 steps to approaching work:

- (1) Set goals. Concentrate on achieving objectives. Focus on the process, not the rewards.
- (2) Master your field. Know your job and institution. Specialize.
- (3) Pace yourself. When working go all out. But don't "hang out" on the job when you're not doing anything.
- (4) Trust your intuition. Most success characteristics are related to self-reliance; the courage to take action to realize your goals.

If you don't like your job, find another. It is difficult to reach your potential in a job you don't like.

In this autumn issue of the campus publication, Quest, (volume 13, no. 3/Autumn 1991) I read an article by Darrel E. Ward which illustrates the importance of enjoying your work. I will share just a portion of his story with you.

When I was 13, happiness was chasing bugs. My friend Mike and I would stalk them through a block-long field on



Chicago's far south side armed with nets fashioned from coat hangers, broom handles, and pillow cases. We'd work our way through the golden-rod, queen anne's lace, and milkweed looking for praying mantises and cicada-killer wasps.

Our mutual love of insects, animals, and biology was the basis of a friendship that would last for years. When Mike got a car, we talked of driving to the Everglades to hunt the kind of bugs, snakes, and lizards we could only dream about. We found work together and took all-night drives to ponder our lives and our future.

Eventually, we drifted apart. He joined the paratroopers, the 101st Airborne and went to Vietnam. He married soon after his tour was over. To my surprise, he chose to study electronics to quickly learn skills that he hoped would earn him a decent living. His decision saddened me. To me, Mike was first and foremost a biologist: he was meant to explore living things not circuit boards. I married a year or so later. My new wife and I moved to Oregon where I went to college for a degree in zoology.

For 17 years, until Mike died of a heart attack at 41, we exchanged occasional letters and spent an evening together every two or three years when I visited Chicago. But his letters had a melancholy tone, and during our visits there was an unmistakable sadness that showed in his walk, his shoulders, his eyes.

Where had the happiness gone? Not wanting to dampen the few hours we could spend together, I didn't ask, and he volunteered little information. Perhaps I no longer really know the friend I had shared so much with. I couldn't help wondering however, if his problem was that he had stopped chasing bugs.

I suspect Mike picked a career in electronics because it is, after all, a highly practical job. Every community needs someone who understands integrated circuits. How many career opportunities are there for Ph.Ds who specialize in the mating habits of fireflies? But I'm afraid in our rush to be practical, in our drive to be successful, we as a culture, like Mike, too often neglect those things that bring us joy.

In your zest to do good things, to accomplish much, to get to the top, don't forget to be good to yourself.

## The Community

Communities throughout the world are constantly changing, some in decline, some experience a degree of constancy, while others experience growth. Always there will be opportunities for you to do something good in the community where you live and also in the world community. Our communities and our societies face many challenges today and will continue to face them well into the 21st century.

Some of the best thinkers in this country and others were asked to write about the challenges that we as a society must face now and in the 21st century. Their views have been recorded in a book entitled An Agenda for the 21 Century. Out of these writings six major challenges seemed to emerge:

1. The degradation of the global environment.  
We need to take deliberate actions to preserve our natural world--to eliminate air and water pollution, destruction of rain forests, erosion of topsoil, pollution of ground water and the like.
2. The danger of over population...."Several of the thinkers see the population problem as the cause of the world's ills: i.e. Third-world hunger, disease, poverty, energy insufficiency, environmental damage, a reshaping of international trade and banking, and immigration pressure."  
(P. 198)
3. The threat of nuclear annihilation...For some thinkers..."The possibility of future physical disaster was of less concern than the immediacy of the mental impact of living in a nuclear age"... (P. 196)
4. The gap between developing and industrial worlds. "University of Chicago President Hanna Gray indicated that the problem is to sustain both a world economy and the hopes for democratic and humanitarian governments...In less-developed countries." (P. 199)
5. The need for fundamental restructuring of educational systems. Most of the thinkers viewed our educational systems as inadequate but saw changes on the horizon.



6. The breakdown in public and private morality.  
 One of the thinkers saw morality as the central issue of the 21st century. Public truth telling and trust are missing from so many negotiations and public actions. (P. 201)

Each person in this graduating class will have opportunities to address these agenda items on an individual basis. You have choices to make. For example you can...

- practice recycling at home; use pesticides and household chemicals with great care
- work on a political campaign
- run for a local school board
- pay your taxes
- vote
- be vocal on important community and world issues
- give to your favorite charity

Become passionate about the world in which you live. Read, study, learn more about your world...its environment, population, educational system, its values and morality. Be more than a critic, take action!

Let's turn our thoughts from the community to:

#### Home and Family

Most social problems begin and end with the family. If you would make a contribution to the world in which you live, do so by creating a healthy family or household.

The single most important social system is the family. As a society we will go to great lengths to create the best armed forces in the world, or the best computer or the best automobile. We do very little to prepare ourselves for creating strong families. If we want to lower the crime rate, build good families, if we want to stop child, spouse and elder abuse, create good families. If we want to renew public faith in elected politicians and in government, create good families. It is time for America to put families first!

Being a parent is a most difficult task but it is teachable/learnable. We can learn how to be a good parents, we can learn how to have healthy families and households. We can do so by studying research on parenting, taking a good course in parenting, by observing those we consider to be good role models, we can learn the best other cultures have to offer. For example, in February of this year, Dr. Larry K. Brendtro in giving the O'Leary Memorial Lecture in the College of Social Work, highlighted the bases for building self-esteem in the native american culture. He indicated

that in the Indian culture, (1) significance was nurtured in a community that celebrated the universal need for belonging, (2) competence was insured by guaranteed opportunity for mastery, (3) power was fostered by deep respect for each person's independence and (4) virtue was reflected in the pre-imment value of generosity.

What and how we teach young children and youth is of vital importance to their success. A value system and a sense of morality are fostered within the home by family members. In Forrest Carter's autobiography The Education of Little Tree, (1976) Carter describes a very special moment in time while living with his Indian grandparents.

Once I spent a whole afternoon collecting some musk bugs, just a few in my pocket, for they are hard to catch. I took them to granma, as I knew she loved sweet smells. She always put honeysuckle in her lye soap when she made it.

She was more excited about the musk bugs than I was, might near. She said she had never smelled anything so sweet and couldn't figger how she had missed out on knowing about musk bugs.

At the supper table she told granpa about it before I could, and how it was the brandest new thing she had ever smelled. Granpa was struck dumfounded. I let him smell of them and he said he had lived seventy odd years, total unaware of such a smell.

Granma said I had done right, for when you come on something that is good, first thing to do is share it with whoever you can find; that way, the good spreads out to where no telling it will go. Which is right.

What a wonderful and subtle way of learning the value of sharing.

If you would make a difference, if you would do something good, then build strong, healthy families. Stinnett and Defrain (Secrets of Strong Families, 1985) provide insight into the qualities of strong families:

1. Are pleasant, positive places to live because members have learned some beneficial ways of treating each other.
2. Family members can count on each other for support, love, and loyalty.
3. They can talk to each other; they enjoy each other.
4. They feel good about themselves as a family unit or team --a sense of belonging with each other--a sense of "we".

5. Family members let no individual be lost or smothered--each is encouraged to develop his or her potential.
6. And family members are able to meet challenges--they are effective problem solvers--they will pull together to pull through.

My plea to you is to do your utmost to create strong families or households.

In summary, there are opportunities to do something good at work, in the community and in the home and family. The choices are yours.

In closing I would like to share a poem by C. Gilbert Wrenn.



Forward I paddle

Janus,  
    God of the beginnings,  
had two faces,  
    one looking forward,  
    one looking backwards  
but the past is of little interest to me.

What it has taught me  
    is now within me.  
I need no focus there.

"My" Janus has but one face,  
    looking forward,  
    forward always forward.

The future holds excitement for me.  
    And promise.

That is why I would not choose to be an oarsman.  
    They are always facing backward.  
    They see only from whence they came.

My choice makes me the paddler in a canoe.  
    I am facing forward.  
    I see no past.  
    I see only future.

And the god within me  
    supplies the energy.  
    Guides the thrust of my paddle.

The goal,  
    the dream.  
    The promise.  
    Enough to draw me on.

As each shadowy form emerges  
    another appears in the misty beyond.  
I face forward and paddle.  
    Why?

I can do nothing else  
    and be true to my god.  
    A god who must be always seeking.  
    Even as I seek.

As I am drawn to what lies ahead.  
    I eat and sleep and dream,  
    as do all animals.



But I do more than dream,  
I paddle.

(By C. Gilbert Wrenn)

And, you too, must continue to paddle.  
So, paddle forward and do something good.  
Thank you and God bless!